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**Testimony Submitted for the  
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women  
February 9, 2010**

This Commission does extremely valuable work in examining for the state of Connecticut the ways in which women's lives are changing in the state and the problems that face them. There is both an old and a new problem. Domestic violence stories have topped the news in 2010, but last year a tragic death was in the news, not from domestic violence but from workplace violence. And to address one without addressing the other is a mistake legislators often make, thinking that home and work are separate places and constitute different kinds of relationships. The workplace relationship, though, can be just as intimate as any relationship we individuals have. Workplace bullying is on the rise, and sometimes, as in the case of Yale graduate student Annie Le, it crosses into the illegal, but deadly sphere, of workplace physical violence.

Workplace bullying is violence, but it isn't physical in the sense that someone receives an actual punch. It is often psychological torment through malicious, persistent techniques designed to erode the worker's confidence and ability to function. This is completely counter-intuitive to what one expects at work, where managers talk about efficiency and keeping employees productive. Yet it is no less a stranger to work than to the home, where talk about love doesn't prevent spousal abuse.

In 2007, 2008 and 2009, the Labor and Public Employees Committee in the Connecticut General Assembly has tried to pass some sort of law to curb workplace bullying. In 2008, there was a version of the Healthy Workplace Bill itself. But the Connecticut Business and Industry Association is hard at work lobbying to stop this bill from every getting a floor vote. The PCSW each year has supported this legislation, and we ask again that you support the effort this year to help both workers and employers combat workplace bullying. Massachusetts just this month introduced a Healthy Workplace Bill 699, and New Jersey has also introduced one.

**Statistics on the Prevalence of Workplace Bullying:**

The Workplace Bullying Institute in Bellingham, Washington, has conducted the most extensive research in the U.S. on the frequency of workplace bullying. It has used various methods, including a Zogby poll, to measure its prevalence. It found:

37% of American workers, an estimated 54 million people, have been bullied at work. It affects half (49%) of American workers, 71.5 million workers, when witnesses are included. Bullying is 4 times more prevalent than illegal forms of "harassment."

**Women are targeted by bullies more frequently (in 57% of cases), especially by other women (in 71% of cases).<sup>1</sup>**

**Resolutions passed against workplace bullying:**

CSU-AAUP: Resolution #3-08-10

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<sup>1</sup> The Workplace Bullying Institute, <http://bullyinginstitute.org/zogby2007/wbi-zogby2007.html> (accessed Dec. 10, 2008).

research the far-reaching impact that the PCSW has on a great number of community agencies working to empower and strengthen women and girls and, therefore, the vast number of women, their male and female children and girls in general for whom your current decision will adversely effect.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Debra A. Greenwood', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Debra A. Greenwood  
President/CEO

The Center for Women and Families of Eastern Fairfield County, Inc.

RESOLVED, That the CSU-AAUP Council support passage of the Healthy Workplace Bill, formally known as SB 60 (An Act Concerning Bullying in the Workplace) and immediately make its position known.

Moved and seconded

Motion passed unanimously. April 17, 2008

NAACP: "Resolved: That NAACP units at all levels will seek legislation at all appropriate levels to deem workplace bullying illegal."<sup>2</sup>

### Stories of Workplace Bullying:

There are many stories of bullying in the workplace. The stories below were posted on a webpage in response to the program Where We Live that focused on workplace bullying. It aired on CT Radio (NPR) on March 17, 2008:

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on March 28, 2008 - 12:50pm.

I work for the State of Connecticut In a department with 30 or more women. I am bullied repeatedly by the other woman, I have been told I smell bad. When I approached both supervisors about this problem, I asked them point blank "do I smell" they said no. I assured these supervisors that I bath, wash my clothes, brush my teeth, come my hair and do all necessary to insure proper hygiene. They agreed that I am one of the neatest and cleanist employee in my department. Yet the bullying persists from my co-workers. It makes it hard for me to go to work. I feel dirty all the time. And it has taken a toll on me mentally. I don't know what to do at this point. My next step will be Affirmative Action, The state's employee Union, and then an attorney. I am trying not to make this any worse but I need some relief from not being picked on and bullied all the time. The supervisor I have are very passive and do not like to confront problems, let alone a group of employees.

reply This link was forwarded to

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on March 19, 2008 - 6:12pm.

This link was forwarded to me by a former co-worker who was a target and was fired by our bully boss. So far I'm only ten minutes into the program and I think you must be writing about my toxic workplace. Most of the employees in my dept that were there when I started have left or been fired; complaints to Human Resources and to upper management have fallen on deaf ears. we all feel as though we have a bullseye on our back and are waiting to see who will be the next one to go, while in the meantime we are suffering from this control freak. The sad part is that I like my job, I like my co-workers, I like the company I work for, and I feel as though I am a good contributor - but I've been looking for another job for a long time now and hope something comes through for me soon.

reply Six Years of Abuse

Submitted by Forced to Quit (not verified) on March 18, 2008 - 3:59pm.

I was sent this page to listen to the segment. My story has a long history to it. I started with a State of CT agency in 2001 and loved my job. I became very ill during my employment and it was discovered that I had aquired Hep B during my employment; I inquired about why I was never vaccinated against this before I started working; but basically I was told that I had fallen through the cracks in the system. I filed a workers comp claim at that point because I didn't know if I was going to get better or not. My body had not decided at that point. It turned out that it was only an accute case and I tried to put my life back to normal and returned to work. When I returned to work I returned to an extreamly hostile work environment. My medical information had been disclosed to my co-workers who didn't want to come near me. I was screamed at daily, they moved my office and assigned me more work. I was told I couldn't use the bathroom and the abuse continued. I contacted my Union, who helped me transfer to another State Agency. During this time I couldn't sleep, eat, and had severe anxiety. My husband didn't understand

<sup>2</sup> 2008 NAACP Annual Convention, <http://www.flanaacp.org/assets/form/resolutions.pdf> (accessed Dec. 10, 2008).

what I was going through. I transferred and the abuse continued, but I still didn't realize what was happening. I was accused of being places I wasn't, my ideas were given to others to research, I was denied training classes unless it was communication classes, screamed at, kicked, given undesirable work, limited my access to computer to do my job. I had personal information disclosed about my health, told rumors about me, spoken down to, constant denial of other positions that I was qualified for, belittled me and my abilities, discriminated against me during my pregnancy and then finally retaliated against after returning to work, and then finally mobbed. No one I went to could help or would help. I was just recently forced to quit to save my withering health. I have four children and a husband and I now have no way to help contribute to my household and have fear of losing my home and my family; all who do not understand what I am going through. Late January of this year was the first time I had ever heard of work place bullying. Only then did I begin to put all the pieces together about what was happening to me and why I always felt so awful all of the time. I started to grow angry because of the abuse and felt like I was the problem. So for anyone who I have ever hurt with my words or actions; I am truly sorry, may you find it in your hearts to forgive me. I can only hope that others can be helped from my story and that maybe we can together have the courage to stand up and help get this bill passed.

reply email to [wherewelive@wnpr.org](mailto:wherewelive@wnpr.org)

Submitted by ctalarski on March 17, 2008 - 10:03am.

In listening to your show this morning, I was moved to call, unfortunately the program ran out of time. I am a Registered Nurse who recently quit a job working for the State of Connecticut due to sexual harrassment and retaliation. This situation was the worst and scariest I have experienced as a professional. I felt alone and very untrusting, at times it seemed everyone was in on the situation due to their odd behavior. People I worked closely with, withheld information that would help me learn and do my job, and made verbal threats to me . It appeared that many of these people had their own emotional issues that they played out in the work place. I was the whistle blower who spoke out against a supervisor who had been inappropriate for years and it appeared everyone was afraid to speak up due to past retaliation. This situation has changed me, I have not sued but I have considered it however the anxiety I feel reliving the situation makes me wonder if it would be worth it. This situation has caused me to become hypervigilant and nervous. I have not felt right and took time off this winter to regroup. I ended up quitting the job due to the lack of support and incredible odd behaviors I was subjected to on a daily basis.

Sincerely

Emily

reply Happened to me before I knew it

Submitted by rp (not verified) on March 17, 2008 - 9:28am.

I had worked for almost eleven years for a small company. Having been purchased by a larger firm, we were struggling to meet the numbers.

A new HR manager was brought in. She made a number of demands on me, and I told her that since I didn't report to her, I needed to hear from my supervisor before I would comply.

Within 72 hours, I was told that my job had been made redundant, and was given 30 minutes to pack my things and leave.

The next day, I was shocked to find out that a similar fate had met another manager in the company. We've both been looking for work for over four months.

The numbers didn't get any better, and the corporation is closing the company. A company that had employed over 75 people for a dozen years being liquidated.

A recent message from management basically said that "it's just business."

Maybe, but I can't help but wonder which came first, the poor performance or the bullying.<sup>3</sup>

#### Conclusion:

Connecticut Healthy Workplace Advocates believes that helping women helps all human beings. As an advocate, I have heard mostly from state employees, municipal employees, teachers, and health care workers, and the majority are women. Their bullies may be male or female; it seems to be about equal, in my experience. Many targets of bullying are too emotionally fragile to come forward. If they have been bullied for any length of time, they appear much as battered spouses do who have been severely traumatized. The shame, fear and self-doubt are all present. There are strong beliefs among targets that they will be unemployable ever again.

Workplace bullying is a form of violence that remains legal and its targets completely unprotected. I ask the PCSW to look into this problem and to stand behind legislation that will help make workplaces healthier.

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<sup>3</sup> Where We Live, <http://www.cpbm.org/program/where-we-live/episode/workplace-bullying> (accessed Dec. 10, 2008). The stories are reproduced exactly as they appeared on the website.

**Testimony of Shannon Houston**  
**Before the Appropriations Committee**  
**In Support of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women**  
**Thursday, February 18, 2010**

Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Shannon Houston, and I am a New Haven resident and graduate student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. I am here today not as a representative of any specific organization or cause, but simply as a woman, a concerned resident of our state, and a future social worker to urge you to maintain funding for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women this year and in the years to come.

We need the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women now more than ever. Despite important advances, research shows that there is still more work to be done to enhance the rights and opportunities of women in our state. For example, on average, women in our state make about 77 cents for every dollar men earn<sup>1</sup>. Connecticut women still frequently report facing discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace<sup>2</sup>, and many women are forced to choose between going to work and caring for their families, due to lack of paid sick time or of quality, affordable child care. More than 130,000 women in our state today have no health insurance.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most disturbingly, one in four Connecticut women is a survivor of sexual assault.<sup>4</sup> These scattered statistics combine to paint an alarming picture of women's ongoing struggle for equality in our state, and make it clear that the PCSW has more work to do.

In today's media-saturated culture, women are bombarded with more conflicting messages on a daily basis than ever before. We're expected to pursue careers while supporting our families, and to look beautiful, young, and thin while doing it. Meanwhile, the media tends to focus more attention on negative stories about women as victims, rather than recognizing the many women who are successful and empowered. As a young woman just finding my way in the world, I know these conflicting messages well. However, through college, work, community service, leadership training, graduate school, and the relationships I've built with many strong women along the way, I have begun to recognize my own leadership potential, and to believe in myself enough to use my voice. These experiences have been critical to my development, and I know that the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is working to ensure that all women in Connecticut have opportunities to pursue such endeavors.

By continuing to support the PCSW, Connecticut is sending a powerful message to all women that our state cares enough about them to spend precious time and resources promoting their rights, safety, economic security, and overall well-being. PCSW's workforce and leadership development initiatives are supporting a new generation of strong female leaders, their trainings and public education are building the capacity of our state to better serve women, and their policy analysis and advocacy efforts are critical to ensuring that all of the legislation passed in Connecticut is fair to all residents. But perhaps most importantly, in supporting the ongoing work of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, you are letting women know that we matter, that you believe in us, and that you're standing behind us.

Thank you,  
Shannon Houston – New Haven, CT  
11<sup>th</sup> Senate district / 96<sup>th</sup> House district